

NOAA RESPONDS TO THE
NEW ENGLAND RED TIDE EVENT
6/16/2005

Q: What is the impact of red tide in Federal waters?

A: There continues to be high concentrations of red tide organisms in Federal waters around Cape Cod. As a result of the risk of PSP, NOAA Fisheries Service has closed a large area of Federal waters to harvest of some shellfish (bivalves).

Q: What fisheries are affected by the Federal closure?

A: All species of bivalve molluscan shellfish (bivalves)

- Surfclams
- Ocean quahogs
- Blue Mussels

Exception: Scallops that are harvested onboard and shucked for the adductor muscle (meat) - (viscera of scallops is affected and closure prohibits landing of whole scallops). Scallops must be shucked at sea. The biotoxin concentrates in internal organs of shellfish not the scallop adductor muscle tissue.

Q: Is it safe to eat other shellfish in Federal waters?

A: Yes. In Federal waters, fish, lobster and crabs are unaffected by the toxin and remain safe for human consumption.

Q: Is it safe to eat shellfish in State waters?

A: State waters are managed by the states and Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire currently have closures for red tide. Refer to the states for details regarding shellfish consumption.

Q: What is the size of the Federal closure?

A: The area is approximately 15,000 square miles (100 x 180 miles) of Federal waters (3-200 miles offshore) off the coasts of New Hampshire and Massachusetts. It does not include any State waters that may be affected by State closure orders. (Refer to map on website/coordinates in press release)

Q: How long will the Federal closure continue?

A: The closure will remain in effect until September 30, 2005 with the possibility of a reduction or an extension of the closure based upon FDA's determination that the concentration of the toxin in shellfish is at a level considered safe for human consumption.

Q: What is the economic impact of the Federal closure?

A: It is not known how long the closure might continue or what the long-term economic and social impacts might be. The impact to the surfclam and ocean quahog fisheries in federal waters depends on the duration of the closure. Since these fisheries are managed under an ITQ system, it is possible for the harvesters to take their full allocation if the area is reopened by September 30, or to harvest their quota in open areas. However, there will be a direct impact to the processors in MA of

surfclams and ocean quahogs in that they will be denied the supply for at least the duration of the closure.

Federal vessel logbook data for 2004 identifies a total of 83 vessels that land surfclams and ocean quahogs from federal waters. For 2004, none of these vessels identified Massachusetts as the state of residence in their permit application, but for seven vessels, Massachusetts was their primary landing state. These seven vessels landed a total of 1.3 million bushels (worth \$6.5 million) of ocean quahogs and 4,320 bushels (worth \$45,360) of surfclams in the state, with Bristol County receiving the vast majority. Not all of these landings were necessarily from the proposed closed area.

Statistics for Federal Closure:

- A total of 3.9 million bushels of ocean quahogs and 3.1 million bushels of surfclams were landed in 2004 with a value of \$23.6 million and \$29.1 million, respectively.
- In the proposed FDA PSP Temporary Closure Area, 296,864 bushels (7.8% of the total) of ocean quahogs were harvested in 2004, worth approximately \$1.78 million, based on an average price of \$6 per bushel. There were 337,696 bushels (10.8% of the total) of surfclams harvested from the proposed FDA PSP Temporary Closure Area in 2004. Using an average price of \$12 per bushel, landings from this area were worth approximately \$4.1 million.

Q: What is the impact on the states' economies?

A: NOAA does not collect economic information on state fisheries. In letters to the Secretary, the governors of Massachusetts and Maine include some information about the impacts. The letters are posted on NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Region's website (<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/redtide/index.html>) and for more information, check with the individual states.

Q: Have the states approached the Federal government for assistance?

A: Yes. The state of Massachusetts has asked the Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide loans to affected fishermen. The SBA will be issuing low-interest loans to qualified individuals. Application workshops are currently being held throughout the Commonwealth. In addition, both Massachusetts and Maine have asked the Secretary to declare a commercial fishery failure that opens the door to federal aid.

Q: Is this considered a commercial fishery failure?

A: Yes. Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez determined that there is a commercial fishery failure. Under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Secretary may declare a commercial fishery failure for fisheries that take place in Federal or state waters. This allows NOAA to provide funding to the states if appropriated by Congress.

Q: How much Federal relief funding is available through NOAA?

A: The amount of relief funding available is dependent upon on the future appropriation of funds by Congress. Funds may be provided to the affected states under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act or through other funding mechanisms. Currently, NOAA does not have funds appropriated for this purpose. However, Congress may choose to appropriate funds either in next

year's budget or in an emergency supplemental appropriation. If funds are appropriated, they may be used to assess the economic and social effects of the commercial fishery failure, or for any activity that the Secretary determines is appropriate to restore the fishery or prevent a similar failure in the future and to assist a fishing community affected by such failure.

Before providing funds, the Secretary must determine that the proposed activity will not expand the size or scope of the commercial fishery failure in that fishery or into another fishery or geographic area. In the past, types of assistance funded under Section 312(a) include buybacks of permits or vessels, data collection, cooperative research activities, direct compensation, and training and employment opportunities.

The Federal share of the cost of any assistance is limited to 75 percent; therefore, each state must provide a match of at least 25 percent of the total assistance provided.

Q: How will the Federal relief funding be allocated?

A: Congress may determine the percent of relief funding that is allocated to the individual states and federal permit holders or it may provide the agency with a lump sum total. Congress may also specify that the money be passed through NOAA Fisheries Service directly to the states or request the agency to determine an allocation formula to disburse the funds. The states would need to determine the use of the funds, eligibility criteria, etc. NOAA Fisheries Service generally awards a grant to the affected state to conduct an assistance program that the state develops and administers. NOAA Fisheries Service would not be notifying permit holder or accepting request for funding from individuals.

Q: How is NOAA studying this red tide event?

A: NOAA is mandated by the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Amendments Act of 2004 - Public Law 108-456 to assist in responding to HAB events like this one. NOAA is providing critical analytical laboratory services and delivering short-term emergency funding to engage a key, NOAA regional partner, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) in the response effort. NOAA emergency funding enables WHOI's HAB experts to design and operate a sampling program that will answer key short-term response questions like when will the bloom and related shellfish closure end; is the bloom expanding; and is there an increased likelihood for future blooms. Engaging WHOI scientists in this response has the added benefit of advancing NOAA goals for a New England regional HAB prediction capability that will mitigate future bloom impacts. This effort is being coordinated throughout NOAA to ensure that agency mandates to safeguard sustainable fisheries, protect public health, and protect endangered species are also being met. NOAA is also assisting the FDA to get samples of bivalves that may carry PSP.

Q: Is there a sampling protocol for Federal waters in the closed area?

A: NOAA and its partners in the region are coordinating to implement a sampling protocol designed to monitor the continuing HAB and its related impacts in the closed area. The sampling protocol will support FDA's National Shellfish Sanitation Program. The FDA will recommend that NOAA Fisheries reopen the area when the cell count drops and the PSP levels are consistently below the safety threshold.

NOAA Relevant Web Sites:

NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Region

<http://www.nero.noaa.gov/nero/hotnews/redtide/index.html>

NOAA New England Red Tide Information Center

<http://www.oceanservice.noaa.gov/redtide/>

NOAA Ocean Service

<http://www.oceanservice.noaa.gov/>

Ecology and Oceanography of Harmful Algal Blooms (ECOHAB)

<http://www.cop.noaa.gov/stressors/extremeevents/hab/current/fact-ecohab.html>

Monitoring and Event Response for Harmful Algal Blooms (MERHAB)

<http://www.cop.noaa.gov/stressors/extremeevents/hab/current/fact-merhab.html>

Small Business Administration

www.sba.gov/disaster